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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000906

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (PERRY)

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TAGS: KZ MNUC PHUM PREL TX ETRA
SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTANI FOREIGN MINISTER TO VISIT TURKMENISTAN

AUGUST 31 TO "THAW THE ICE"

REF: A. (A) PERRY/BRUSH 8/18/06 EMAIL

- ¶B. (B) 05 ASHGABAT 118
- ¶C. (C) 04 ASHGABAT 1093
- 1D. (D) 04 ASHGABAT 999 1E. (E) ASHGABAT 415
- <u>¶</u>F. (F) ASHGABAT 162

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Jennifer L. Brush, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

(C) Kazakhstani Ambassador to Turkmenistan Murat Atanov told Charge on August 21 that Foreign Minister Tokayev is scheduled to visit Ashgabat August 31. According to Atanov, Tokayev's mission will be to "thaw the ice" of Kazakhstan's relations with Turkmenistan Atanov subsequently told Char relations with Turkmenistan. Atanov subsequently told Charge on August 24 Tokayev also will try to persuade President Niyazov to sign a Central Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone agreement. Relations between Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are strained, with little to no bilateral or regional cooperation. Nazarbayev requested a visit to Turkmenistan over two years ago and Niyazov apparently has yet to acknowledge the request. The borders remain largely non-delineated. Local ethnic Kazakhs complain of increasing discrimination. Trade is minimal, mostly consisting of private shuttle trader importation of Kazakh flour. Turkmenistan's relations with Kazakhstan mostly are no better or worse than its relations with the rest of its neighbors. End Summary.

Tokayev Visit

- (C) At a party celebrating Russian Ambassador Blatov's 60th birthday, Kazakhstani Ambassador Atanov told Charge his Foreign Minister Tokayev was scheduled to visit Ashgabat August 31. According to Atanov, Tokayev wants to "thaw the ice" of Kazakhstan's frosty relations with Turkmenistan. Atanov said that Tokayev's visit first and foremost would be to lay the foundations for President Nazarbayev to visit Turkmenistan. In response to Charge's question, Atanov affirmed that Nazarbayev had written to Niyazov over two years ago requesting a visit and that Niyazov never had responded. Atanov subsequently told Charge on August 24 Tokayev also would try to persuade Niyazov to sign a Central Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone agreement.
- 13. (C) As a matter of record, Niyazov intensely dislikes all

of his Central Asian counterparts. During a February 2005 meeting with former DAS Kennedy (ref b), Niyazov insisted that Turkmenistan did well by comparison to the rest of Central Asia. While the other Central Asian countries were characterized by high crime, unemployment and high levels of trafficking in persons, Turkmenistan was stable and crime free. "Our women are not reduced to seeking humiliating work," he said. In response to the DAS's comment that political freedoms were greater in other Central Asian countries, Niyazov said, "if there were free and open elections, those guys (the current leaders in Central Asia) would all end up in jail." Niyazov accused Karimov and Nazarbayev of being mixed up in crime and corruption and being pawns of the "businessmeni." Though he did not throw Tajikistani President Rakhmonov into this group, he dismissed him as "a peasant." Niyazov noted all the current Central Asian leaders were tired and the only thing preventing them from retiring was fear of going to prison.

¶4. (C) Niyazov set a precedent for meeting with his colleagues regardless of his dislike for them, when he agreed to meet with President of Uzbekistan Karimov in Bukhara in November 2004 (ref c). Then Uzbekistani Charge Rasulov told embassy Karimov had requested the meeting after an increase in border skirmishes. During the Bukhara meeting Karimov and Niyazov signed agreements on water, borders and friendship. A few months following the meeting, the first Uzbekistani ambassador since the 2002 assassination attempt presented his credentials to Niyazov. Though Niyazov apparently still "hates" Karimov, at least relations between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are less tense than prior to the Bukhara meeting.

Dog Days

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15. (C) Relations between Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan never reached the nadir of the latter's relations with Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, relations between the two have been steadily declining since both declared independence in 1991. Relations hit their most absurd point in July 2005 when departing Kazakhstani Ambassador Gizzatov was accused of smuggling Turkmenistan's prized Alabay sheepdogs into Kazakhstan. The Kazakhstani DCM at the time vehemently denied any wrongdoing and told DCM the case was completely trumped up to discredit Kazakhstan. When Charge mentioned this incident to Atanov at the August 21 event, Atanov just laughed saying, "The Alabay dogs are descended from Kazakh dogs, they were our dogs to begin with, but anyway the incident was just more Turkmen theater."

Backroom Flour and Great Mud

16. (C) The most visible sign of Kazakhstan's trade with Turkmenistan is the omnipresence and superiority of Kazakhstani flour. Long the bread basket of the former Soviet Union, Kazakhstan's "Sarybay" and "Amangeldi" brand flour are the most popular brands of flour sold in Turkmenistan. Though the president's agricultural policy is one of self-sufficiency with an inefficient and irrational emphasis on flour and cotton, Turkmenistan's flour is not considered high-quality. According to locals, Turkmenistan's flour only is suitable for making the local flatbread "corek." Kazakhstani flour is used for all other baking needs. Apparently importation of Kazakhstan's flour mainly is conducted by shuttle-traders, acknowledging the superiority of Kazakhstan's flour would be out of keeping with the president's emphasis on the excellence of all things That has not stopped authorities from trying to tax Turkmen. the imported flour, however. After an imported flour tax was introduced in 2005, for a month or so, Kazakhstani flour only was sold in backrooms. Now apparently a mechanism has been established and Kazakhstani flour is available in abundance, although at a significant premium, throughout Turkmenistan.

(U) During embassy,s recent trip to Turkmenbashy (septel), emboffs saw large amounts, probably nearly a thousand large sacks, of Kazakh drilling mud at storage facilities used by Petronas to support its drilling operations in the Caspian Sea. While complaining about poor packaging, Petronas subcontractors raised no complaints about the quality of Kazakh drilling mud and appeared to expect continued supplies to arrive from Kazakhstan.

Unmarked Borders

- $\underline{\mbox{1}}8$. (C) Turkmenistan's border with Kazakhstan, never formally delineated under the Soviet Union, still is not clearly marked. As reported ref d, negotiations between the two countries over Caspian Sea delimitation has been stalled since July 2003. Turkmenistan also has formally protested the Kazakhstani-Azerbaijani bilateral delimitation agreement, claiming five points along the agreed upon line actually belonged to Turkmenistan.
- 19. (U) During an April visit to the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan border, accompanied by StateBorder Guard (SBS) officials, embassy's EXBS Advisor found much of the border unmarked. ${\tt SBS}$ officials also told ${\tt EXBS}$ that there were ten disputed border areas along the border. The lone dirt road wove into and out of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and even Uzbekistan with no border crossing points along the way. According to the SBS officials, because the road was off-limits to anyone but border officials anyway, the lack of markings was not an urgent issue for any of the three governments. Pipelines
- 10. (C) During most conversations about gas, Government of Turkmenistan officials complain bitterly about the poor infrastructure of Uzbekistan's and Kazakhstan's pipelines, through which Turkmenistan's gas has to pass to reach its Russian, Ukrainian and ultimately European markets. According to Turkmenistan's officials, the volume of export of Turkmenistan's gas only is limited by the small capacity and crumbling infrastructure of its neighbors-to-the-north's pipelines. Government of Turkmenistan officials frequently

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remind visitors that Turkmenistan has invested considerably in modernizing and increasing the pipeline capacity within Turkmenistan, (note: though foreign oil and gas firms working in Turkmenistan think much more needs to be done).

 $\P 11$. (C) In response to Charge's question at the August 21 event, Atanov said that Kazakhstan would welcome a pipeline from Turkmenistan's gas reserves along the Amu Darya, through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, to China.

Treatment of Kazakh Minority

112. (C) The most sensitive issue between the two governments is Turkmenistan's treatment of its ethnic Kazakh minority. According to Atonov, of the 150,000 Kazakhs residing in Turkmenistan before independence, all but 40,000 have left. Mainly settled in Turkmenbashy (formerly Krasnovodsk or Kizil Su), before independence Kazakhs had Kazakh language schools and media. Now the schools are closed and all education is in Turkmen. Poloffs traveling to the northwest corner of Turkmenistan earlier this year found an entire Kazakh village (known locally as "Kazak Obasy") deserted. Local employees say there also used to be Kazah villages outside of Turkmenabat, Ashgabat and Dashoguz, which had Kazakh schools, but Kazakhs have been slowly abandoning these villages. The head of the local "Kazakh Diaspora" community Bagyt Begdesonova wrote to the embassy earlier this year complaining that ethnic Kazakh citizens of Turkmenistan studying in Kazakhstan were being harassed by Government of

Turkmenistan Embassy officials, who were threatening them if they did not come back to Turkmenistan to do their military service. Embassy could not independently confirm this story, however.

113. (C) During a January 20 meeting (ref f), Mayor of Turkmenbashy Ashyrniyaz Pomanov assured DCM that though Kazakh language classes were available, they were poorly subscribed because local Kazakhs were "begging" to learn Turkmen.

CANWFZ

114. (C) At the August 24 Ukrainian National Day reception, Atanov told Charge Tokayev also would try to persuade Niyazov to sign a Central Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone agreement. Atanov said Turkmenistan was the only hold out in Central Asia regarding this agreement. In a separate conversation UK Charge Chris Bowden reminded Charge that Turkmenistan had refused to sign the agreement in 2005 after being demarched by the UK.

Comment

- 115. (C) Niyazov may use Turkmenistan's status of "permanent neutrality" to avoid signing the CANWFZ. Turkmenistan's constitution specifically prohibits the development, storage or use of weapons of mass destruction, possibly making a CANWFZ redundant from Niyazov's point of view. And finally, Niyazov is allergic to regional cooperation in any area.
- 116. (C) In terms of Turkmenistan's overall relations with Kazakhstan, a Nazarbayev visit, like the Niyazov/Karimov summit in 2004, might settle some border disputes, but is unlikely to accomplish much more.